

The American Churches and the European War

A Message from The Church Peace Union

February 8, 1915.

TO THE CHURCHES AND CLERGY OF AMERICA:

In this time of tumult, when more than half the population of the globe is involved in war, the Church of God should counsel:

Moderation. Partisanship is adding fuel to fires of passion which already are too hot. Clergymen should allay prejudice, not intensify it. Each of the warring nations believes in the justice of its cause. Their disputes are of long standing, involving all the governments concerned, and their full history is yet to be written. In a period of such tense feeling, it is not easy to unravel the tangled skein of motives and events. It is a grievous thing that there is war between peoples whom we respect and count our friends. In this calamitous hour, denunciation of either side assumes a superhuman knowledge of complex policies and purposes, imperils the influence of our Government in promoting peace, aggravates a quarrel which we should help to abate, creates dissensions among our own people, inflames a war spirit in America, and gives force to the criticism that the Church has abdicated its sacred function as the maker of peace and concord.

Penitence. We should realize not only that each of the warring nations has helped to create the conditions of which the War is a tragic expression but that these conditions characterize Americans as well as Europeans. We are quite as belligerent in temper as other men. We should condemn the causes of war; but we should look for them not so much in state papers as in the fears and prejudices and rivalries which are common to men everywhere except as they are influenced by the divine spirit. Our own freedom from militarism has been due to protecting oceans rather than to superior virtue. The present clamor for an armament to resist a possible attack is prompted, not by peril, but by the disposition to echo on our side of the sea the cries which have been heard in Europe for years, and it is engendering the same suspicions that have wrecked the relations of Germany and Great Britain. Are we to repeat the policy which is drenching the Continent with blood? This is the time to prepare, not for war, but for peace.

Faith. God only can "speak peace" to the nations. He alone can recreate a chaotic world. Materialistic civilization has developed mind and energy rather than conscience. The peoples whose universities are the greatest, whose statesmen and philosophers the most famous, whose industrial achievements the most advanced, whose armies and navies the most colossal, are the very ones that are fighting. Modern science has equipped race hatred with deadlier

weapons and thus increased its power for ruin. A world order built up by secular education and dependent on force has collapsed. Christianity has not failed; but nations have failed to be Christian. The ideas underlying this War spring from a savage interpretation of life and directly contravene the teachings of Jesus. The paramount need, therefore, is a new interpretation in the light of a fresh discovery of God and of what He requires of man. This need transcends questions of national policy and armament. The settlement of existing strife awaits its fulfillment. There is no other hope for humanity. The task is stupendous; but "all things are possible to him that believeth." Have we faith to believe, faith to draw boldly upon the undeveloped resources of the Church in God for the reconstruction of the world?

Righteousness —international righteousness. Religion too often has been conceived as so local and personal that it had no relation to national policies. Men in their corporate capacity as a state have ignored moral laws that as citizens they uphold. The time has come to insist that the law of the jungle should be replaced by the law of humanity; that there is no double standard of ethics; that there cannot be one rule for individuals and another for their governments; that deceiving others, oppressing the weak, stealing territory, destroying property, and murdering rivals, acts which are criminal between men, are no less wrong between nations; that the real greatness of a people lies not in regiments and battleships but in justice and forbearance; and that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

Brotherhood. We profess to believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, that "God hath made of one blood all nations." Why has not this gospel wrought its normal work among the nations? Why are men trying to settle by slaughter what can be settled only by mutual good-will? Because they have not accepted the implications of their belief; because they regard one another as foes rather than as friends. Clearly then it is the mission of the Churches to inculcate the principles of mutual respect and confidence, to make real the faith that we preach. Let us keep out of the wordy warfare about incidents which, however lamentable, are the concomitants of all wars, and concentrate our efforts upon the major evangel of divine brotherhood. When nations are walking among heaps of powder with lighted matches, an explosion is inevitable sooner or later. The vital question concerns not so much the dropping of a match as the presence of the powder. Why was it there? If nations fear and hate one another, they will fight whether they annually add one or a dozen battleships to their navy, or a thousand or a hundred thousand men to their army. The Golden Rule must be made effective in international intercourse. This is the urgent duty of the churches, and American churches now have free opportunity to speak. They should be the channel through which the grace of God can become operative. They should make clear the distinction between the teachings of Jesus and so-called modern civilization, cease baptizing national pride and selfishness with the name of patriotism, put forth greater effort to make the divine spirit leaven all human relationships, and proclaim the missionary message of international Christianity, of altruistic ministries to other peoples, of God as the universal Father instead of a national deity, of the unity of the human race, of religion as "the power of God unto salvation" and the antithesis of aggression and brute force.

Sympathy. For our brethren on both sides, many of whom are fighting more in grief than in anger; for the sick and the wounded; for parents bereft of their sons, wives of their husbands, and children of their fathers. Let us not complain that in this era of agony we are called upon to give largely of our means, but let us be humbly grateful that we can help our brothers in their time of utter need.

Prayer. That the spirit of God may so pervade the governments and peoples now at war that peace may be speedily established on a basis of mutual forbearance and love; that with humble confession of our sins, we seek a fuller understanding of the divine purpose for

men and its more consistent expression in the life of nations; that the brutal and selfish elements in our civilization may be eliminated; that all men may realize that they are brothers; that all who are ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of the soldiers and their suffering wives and children may be given needful grace and strength; that the God of all pity and comfort may help the sick, the wounded and the dying, and guide the sorrowing peoples who are groping their way in the darkness that has fallen upon them; and that out of the tumult and strife of this present time the longings of a stricken world may be realized in an era of universal righteousness.

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace.”

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